

Solving the 2017 EFF DEFCON Tee

- first, you do the obvious thing and translate the japanese: the front says resistance and the back says atsumari
- well, you know what resistance is, but what's atsumari? it's a game, similar to sudoku, with a game board that looks strangely similar to the design on the back. but atsumari is supposed to have numbers in it, not colors and pictures.
- ok so back to resistance, can you do something with that? the bee on the front has a body that looks like a resistor. to read a resistor, you use the colored bands. translated, the bee-resistor has number 566. What's that? Well, if you take an alphanumeric index (a = 1, b = 2...), that spells... EFF! Nice, but not helpful for the puzzle.
- but now we've been clued that that resistor band colors are a thing. and there are colors on the back, two of which are black, which is 0 in resistor, and atsumari often has two spots with 0 in them (conveniently, also colored black in traditional atsumari representations), so that's promising. so, replace the colored spots with their resistor-number.
- well, now we have an atsumari board. solve the atsumari.
- the solution to the atsumari spells out XXV. this is DEF CON 25, so that's a good hint that we're going in the right direction.
- what haven't we used? well, there's all those weird symbols. maybe we could translate them into text.
- reading off left to right, top to bottom, it's not clear what to do with them. even putting them in a cryptoquote solver doesn't give off meaningful english text. so, what if we look at just the ones inside the xxv, or just the ones outside the xxv?
- at this point, you need to translate the symbols into letters. this can be done with a cryptoquote solver, or by noticing that many of the symbols have names that hint to what letter they're supposed to represent. here are the names we were using, in order of first overall appearance on the shirt:
wifi
eye
ladies/lesbians
DNA
on
no starch press
code
unicorn
mouse
tools
skull
hat
runner
invader
axes
- now apply these to the two groups. if you start out trying the letters remaining after removing the XXV, it spells out "well done now use the other letters instead"
- do what it says, and read out the other group: "Welcome to the resistance!" That's the puzzle answer.